

Eugene Weekly's

UNCORKED

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Ich Bin Ein Pfalzer

Giving German wines a go at 'S Wine BY LANCE SPARKS

Kind of a fun chapter in the lore of Wine World tells us that when the conquering

Roman legions reached the northern valleys of what is now Germany, they decided they had also reached the climatic limits for the growing of wine grapes — and there was no compelling reason to conquer a place where they couldn't make their wine. (Some of this might've been rationalization, as the Teutonic tribes were also really nasty fighters who seemed to delight in slaughter and mayhem, a fact that centuries later came back on southerners when the armies of Goths and Visigoths sacked Rome and, in effect, became the Holy Roman Empire.)

In any case, the Romans were wrong, at least in part, because wine grapes (some) thrive in those cooler regions, and the wines made there are delicious, complex and versatile with a broad range of foods.

Still, it's well known among wine retailers that there's almost no harder sell — especially to Americans — than German wines.

So why would a smart, energetic wine entrepreneur like Monika McEachern choose to specialize in German wines, and locate her attractive little store in, of all places, tiny, rural Pleasant Hill? Partly, McEachern says, because she's German-bred (though actually born in Sydney, Australia), and knows and loves the wines of that region. "I'm doin' okay," she says.

McEachern's shop, 'S Wine, is located in the Ray's shopping center, in what amounts to the urban core of Pleasant Hill, just off Highway 58, about a 10-plus minute drive from Eugene. It's small, warm and welcoming, with antique tables and comfy chairs (outside seating in summer). The walls are decorated by works from local artists, with a retail space displaying porcelains, salad dressings, chocolates, even a few beers. McEachern also serves her homemade soups and breads (try her whole wheat with flax, chewy crust and soft middle — delish), plus cheeses and other nibbles to accompany tastes and/or glasses of her selected wines: whites, reds, rosés, sparklers and incredible dessert wines.

Also on display are about 50 German wines, all from the Pfalz and Baden regions of southern Germany, much less known than wines from the northern river valleys of the Moselle and Rhine. (And these are the regions where the Romans ended up planting their grapes and making their wines; just ask McEachern and she'll show you the maps and pics.)

Pfalz and Baden are warmer — "And the soils are much different," McEachern adds — and although the growers there, like their northland neighbors, favor the Riesling grape, they also grow some notable other grapes, even some reds. "The wines really sell themselves," McEachern says. "The trick is to get people in here to try them. Once they taste, they usually come back for a bottle."

McEachern, 53, is attractive and dynamic, with short-cut reddish hair, bright blue eyes, a snappy grin and a big laugh. The daughter of a German diplomat, she grew up in various capitals across the world before settling, with musician husband William McEachern, in Pleasant Hill in 1991.



MONIKA MCEACHERN PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

In her own terms, she's "Small Monika" (she stands a shade over five feet) to distinguish her from "Big Monika" (maybe 5'10"), who is Monika Rauch, her close friend and another force in importing (owner of Kastle Hill, importer of select wines) and selling the wines of Pfalz and Baden.

Together, Rauch and McEachern have traveled the regions where both originated, and they work closely to choose and promote the wines. Recently, Big Monika succeeded in placing, as wine specials, two of her selections in Sabai, the popular new Thai restaurant in the Oakway Center. The wines — an off-dry Riesling and a Scheurebe — brilliantly complement the spicy and lively Thai dishes. "They're also great with Indian cuisine," says "Small Monika."

These German white wines are fresh, with pear/apple/citrus flavors, usually with a touch of sweetness that rounds out the flavors but is balanced with a zesty acidity that keeps them from seeming cloying or flabby. The reds rely on a grape called Dornfelder, but also include Spatburgunder (pinot noir, though of course the Germans don't use the French name).

Still not sure? Daunted a little by the labels and problems of pronunciation? Think you'd like to try before you buy? "I let people pick," McEachern says. "Then I'll open a bottle, let them taste, then sell the rest by the glass. So that's really kinda fun."

Prices are moderate. Glass pours run to \$6, and bottles range between \$17 to an upper end of \$38 (that special Spatburgunder) to \$54 for a half-bottle of spectacular dessert wine designated as Beerenauslese.

'S Wine has been in its location only two months, but it's already a social hub, even offering live music on some weekend nights. "I have a lot of regulars already," McEachern says. Easy to see why: Between the delicious wines, the cozy space and the gracious, fun-loving presence of "Small Monika" McEachern, the little shop just rocks bucolic Pleasant Hill. It's a brief drive to a good time and new discoveries.

If the Romans had only known... ❖



In Vino Veritas, So Why So Sniffy?

Wise words for the would-be wine fan BY ANDY VALENTINE

Everyone's been there: It's a special occasion, so you're sitting in a fancier-than-normal restaurant, enjoying some freshly cooked *cioppino* (or any other expensive sounding seafood), when some loud-mouthed wine "connoisseur" is ushered to the table right next to yours.

Next thing you know, wine guy is perusing the wine list and discussing the fact that he enjoys "dry, full-bodied wines from the south of France," or something he hopes sounds equally impressive to his date as well as every patron within earshot. This is the same guy who eventually will call the waiter back to the table and claim that his wine is "corked," and that he would like a replacement bottle. Most likely, he is also the guy who has seen one too many wine-tasting shows on the Food Network and now believes he knows exactly what he's talking about.

This guy is ill informed. Do not listen to this guy.

Words like "dry" and "full-bodied" are thrown around all the time in the wine community, and to those who are actually able to define them, they are just simple vocabulary. The truth is, though, a lot of people are

only making educated stabs at what these words actually mean. And it's these same phrases that strike fear into the hearts of newcomers who possess a genuine interest in wine, as the risk of sounding uninformed seems too high a price to pay for getting involved.

I'm here to tell you: Have no fear.

I, for one, had always thought that "dry" was indicative of that cheek-clenching dry mouth sensation that occurs quite often when drinking red wine — turns out it just means "the opposite of sweet." In fact, that puckering sensation is caused by tannin — a low-weight, astringent plant compound known for its bitterness.

I was lucky enough to speak face-to-face with Boris Wiedenfeld of Sundance Wine Cellars (2441 Hilyard St.), and he informed me with great ease that, despite all the scientific crap, the world of wine is not nearly as complicated as it seems.

Breaking down the most enjoyable way to taste wine is simple; it all has to do with employing four of your five senses. First of all, the way a wine looks in a glass can give the drinker hints toward a number of things, including the quality, intensity and age of a wine. For example, if a red wine is bluish — that

is, closer to purple — then it is younger. If the wine looks to be "cloudy," then most likely it's not of good quality. A good wine should be translucent.

Now that you're done looking at your wine, you can smell it. There are a number of misconceptions surrounding the smelling of wine — most of them based on the idea that it is designed for something far more complicated than its actual purpose. In truth, people smell wine because it smells good.

"I'll have people come in here for wine tastings on Fridays, and they'll stand there for the entire night just smelling the same glass," Wiedenfeld told me, further indicating that sensual enjoyment should be the wine taster's primary concern. Smelling wine also can give the taster some indication as to the complexity of the wine — though that kind of thing can be reserved for the boring, critical tasters and thrown to the side whenever pleasure takes precedence.

Once you're all done hawking whiffs of wine up your nostrils, the moment everyone's been waiting for has arrived: It's time to taste that shit.

Here's the part of wine tasting where that guy from the restaurant thinks it's his time to shine; here's where words like "dry," "full-bodied," "finish," "corked" and "fruity" start flying around like linguistic shrapnel in a wine-infested war zone. Don't worry, the fun of wine is not knowing every single one of these words and using them as much as possible — it's entirely sensual, and no wannabe wine snob should be able to take that from you.

The most enjoyable way to taste wine is to first take a sip and swish it like mouthwash. This helps to build up the level of acidity in your mouth so the wine will not be so out of balance when it's finally sipped. After waiting a little while, a normal sip can be taken and enjoyed. Here, pay attention to the way the wine coats your mouth, and also to the subtle flavors. No matter how each wine tastes, much of the fun to be had is in spotting differences among the various wines — relish this.

In case you're wondering (and, like I was, you probably are), a wine that's "full-bodied" will simply coat your mouth and throat more intensely. This has to do with viscosity, and a wine's "finish" is simply determined by how long the flavor stays in your mouth after tasting.

"No one's going to put 'has a short finish' on their label," Wiedenfeld told me before grabbing a bottle of corked wine and showing me exactly how it smells.

If you think your wine is corked, chances are it isn't. If that asshole in the restaurant thinks his wine is corked, chances are it isn't. Corked wine smells like wet cardboard wrapped around a log of Steven Seagal's shit — and I'm gonna go ahead and guess that it doesn't taste much better. Most people returning a bottle of wine because it's "corked" just don't like the wine. "It wasn't what they were expecting," said Wiedenfeld.

Wine tasting should be done entirely for personal enjoyment. Now is the time to block out those knowledgeable (or pretentious) winos and start fresh. Now is the time to get involved, no matter how scary the vocabulary is. Now is the time to become a wine fan. ❖

BORIS WIEDENFELD PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER





WINERY: Mogen David (aka "Mad Dog 20/20")
VINTAGE: circa January 2011 (a fine year indeed)
WINE NAME: "Orange Jubilee"
WINE CATEGORY: Slurpy w/alcohol
GRAPE BLEND: Orange
REGION: Westfield, New York
ALCOHOL: 13 percent

REVIEW: The complex jamlike and lean taste of this wine may nudge one to more appropriately nickname it "Mad Dog Orange Julius." The distinctly lemony orange temperance is reminiscent of a poorly made daiquiri mixed by your alcoholic aunt at a summer get-together. Lively and mouth filling, this is a drink that must be had on a hot day with cheap meat.

The Grape American Acetic NyQuil Taste Test

BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST

*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging:
 and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise*
 — PROVERBS 20:1

A connoisseur evaluates a work of art on the basis of aesthetic conclusions. Judgments are informed by intuition, but must be grounded in a true understanding of the art form being evaluated. Wine is an art form. I am not a connoisseur. However, I am willing to bet that I have spent enough time with wine — possibly a great deal more time than you — that I can speak knowingly on its behalf.

On the fundamental basis of experiential practice, the fine tuning of insight and a regimented system of analysis, I have attempted to attribute authorship, validate legitimacy and appraise value to a series of wines that most people consider infamous, juvenily lowbrow or just plain bummy. These findings have been collected and organized into a catalogue raisonné placed below:



WINERY: Mogen David (aka "Mad Dog 20/20")
VINTAGE: circa April 2011
WINE NAME: "Banana Red"
WINE CATEGORY: American "Fortified" Wine
GRAPE BLEND: Red bananas, gummy bears, cough syrup
REGION: Westfield, New York
ALCOHOL: 13 percent

REVIEW: This refined spirit contains an element of the strawberry candies your grandmother used to buy you at the supermarket. A chewy "nouveau" style taste, similar to the gummy flavor of cherry NyQuil, is the most prevalent feature of MD 20/20 Banana Red. Citrusy yet cloudy, this wine is a must-have for those looking to partake in the temperate (i.e., societally underrated) day drunk.



WINERY: Carlo Rossi Vineyards
VINTAGE: circa May 2011 (shortly after we smoked Osama)
WINE NAME: "Chablis"
WINE CATEGORY: Holy Communion
GRAPE BLEND: Old world, French, pear, collegiate
REGION: Modesto, California
ALCOHOL: 9.5 percent

REVIEW: This fruity, flowery and overripe concoction is the staple of American art schools and religious ceremonies alike. The perfumed, raisiny, thin-bodied mix of ingredients ensures both a rite of passage and a heady hangover no matter who you are. Carlo Rossi's Chablis is best served slightly chilled, through the plastic hose of a camel pack. Most importantly, this wine comes in excess of quantity over quality, making it all the more difficult (yet rewarding) to sneak into your dorm room.

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WINERY: E&J Gallo Winery
VINTAGE: Ha!
WINE NAME: "Thunderbird"
WINE CATEGORY: American Classic
GRAPE BLEND: Sour, deadly, poisonous
REGION: Modesto, California
ALCOHOL: 17.5 percent

REVIEW: The acetic and warm taste of Thunderbird is astringent in its nature. A cross between paint thinner and stale urine, this austere blend of god-knows-what is a sure way to make sure that you forget about whatever it is that just happened to you. This wine has legs, an unmistakable balance that is beyond words. Though not meaty, one would be incorrect in thinking that such a fine drink lacks brawn.



WINERY: Boone's Farm
VINTAGE: 2011 (I guess)
WINE NAME: "Strawberry Hill"
WINE CATEGORY: High-school panty-dropper
GRAPE BLEND: Flavored citrus wine
REGION: Modesto, California
ALCOHOL: 7.5 percent

REVIEW: This fruity, vibrant wine has a signature strawberry flavor that is sure to achieve its desired effect — the fumbling beginnings of sexual interaction, most likely taking place in the backseat of a vehicle parked someplace secluded. With an angular taste reminiscent of flavored soda water, this herbaceous blend boasts an aromatic bouquet and an alcohol content that is slightly higher than the other Boone's Farm flavors.



WINERY: Night Train Limited
VINTAGE: 2011 A.D.
WINE NAME: Night Train Express
WINE CATEGORY: FML
GRAPE BLEND: NyQuil
REGION: Modesto, CA
ALCOHOL: 17.5 percent

REVIEW: The rich, ponderous and tarry taste of Night Train Express is not for everyone. It is a very special breed of beverage, and in fact, one would have to be in a very special place to enjoy this wine — somewhere between divorce and job loss. The Express is a pruney wine, best served very cold so as to help the human body receive its cloying taste. You'd be surprised what the human body can adapt to; this grapey spirit is definitely testament to that. ❖

PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

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At The End of The Bottle

Local entrepreneurs make interesting uses of corks BY BRIT MCGINNIS



he slogan of Creative Corks N' More is "Garbage Has Feelings Too." But the impression you receive from the web-based Eugene craft company isn't that they're working with garbage. They're working with materials they love. And they're making things too awesome to describe.

Even better: They're not snobby about the whirlwind success of their wine-cork products. "We started because we had a lot of corks and we didn't know what to give people for Christmas," laughs Tanita Brown, one of Creative Corks' founders.

A barrel full of corks later, Brown and her fiancée had the roots of a business. Creative Corks has become well known mostly for its hanging wall boards, especially those in the shape of letters. Each is

entirely composed of corks and takes about five hours each to create. "It can be tedious work, but it allows me to work at home and have time with my cat," Brown says.

She describes the letters as being especially popular for wedding gifts, though these orders often entail some level of specialization. "With weddings, they usually want etchings of people's names or the wedding date. They can even request the board to be made out of only champagne corks, when we usually only do wine."

Brown can't contain her enthusiasm for her budding business: "It's my full-time job now, and I'm always just wanting to jump and down for joy because of how successful we've been."



The head of the grassroots company, however down to earth, speaks with the ancient knowledge of a local crafter. Brown takes pride in the practicality as well as the beauty of her goods. She also has hope that the American crafting scene will expand over time. "People are going to craft more and more over time, just because of the economy. If you can make even one hundred dollars a week selling your crafts, that's enough to pay your cell phone bill. People are looking for new ways to earn money."

Creative Corks has enjoyed incredible commercial success through eBay, but most of its following comes from one of the most famous craft-marketing websites today — Etsy.com. The site's become an outlet for crafters to sell their goods to a global audience, and features all of Creative Corks' merchandise. Its types of goods have become more and more varied, now including not only cork letters but coasters, keychains and even more types of art featuring recycled material. The company's latest obsession: solar-powered lights made from Mason jars. You can't keep quirky but useful down. ❖

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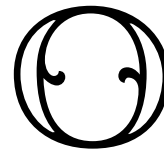
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Wike A Hike, But Dwunker

Oregon combines wine/hiking for the tourists BY JOHN LOCANTHI



PHOTO COURTESY BRAD NIVA / WILDROGUE.COM



Oregon is a state rich in natural beauty, with literally hundreds of vineyards. People come from all across the nation to go hiking along the scenic rivers, lakes and mountains. Other folks are increasingly visiting the state for its growing wine reputation.

A few industrious Oregonians have combined the two tourist activities to create (drum roll please) “wiking” — hiking and wine tasting together at last. As goofy as that term may sound, wiking is growing in popularity. In the May 13 Travel section of *The New York Times*, Oregon was featured as the nexus of several new wiking adventure outfits, from day hikes to longer, more intensive excursions.

Rogue Wilderness Adventures has a four-day, 40-mile hike along the Rogue River that features nightly wine tastings and lectures from a winemaker. There is a tour opening along the Metolious River where guides carry bottles of wine along the hike. And this summer, Grand Cru Wine Tours is opening the first wiking trail through wine country or, to be precise, the southern Willamette Valley.

The trail starts at Left Coast Cellars and leads hikers through Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge along with various other vineyards. Byron Williams, who created this wiking tour, attempted to weave together wine country and the natural beauty of the state.

“These are things you don’t get on a normal hike,” Williams said. “Great scenery, great wildlife, yes, but you also get to try some wine along the way.”

For more information on local and state wiking adventures, visit www.grandcruwinetours.com, www.travelsalem.com, www.wildrogue.com or www.wanderlusttours.com or www.traveloregon.com

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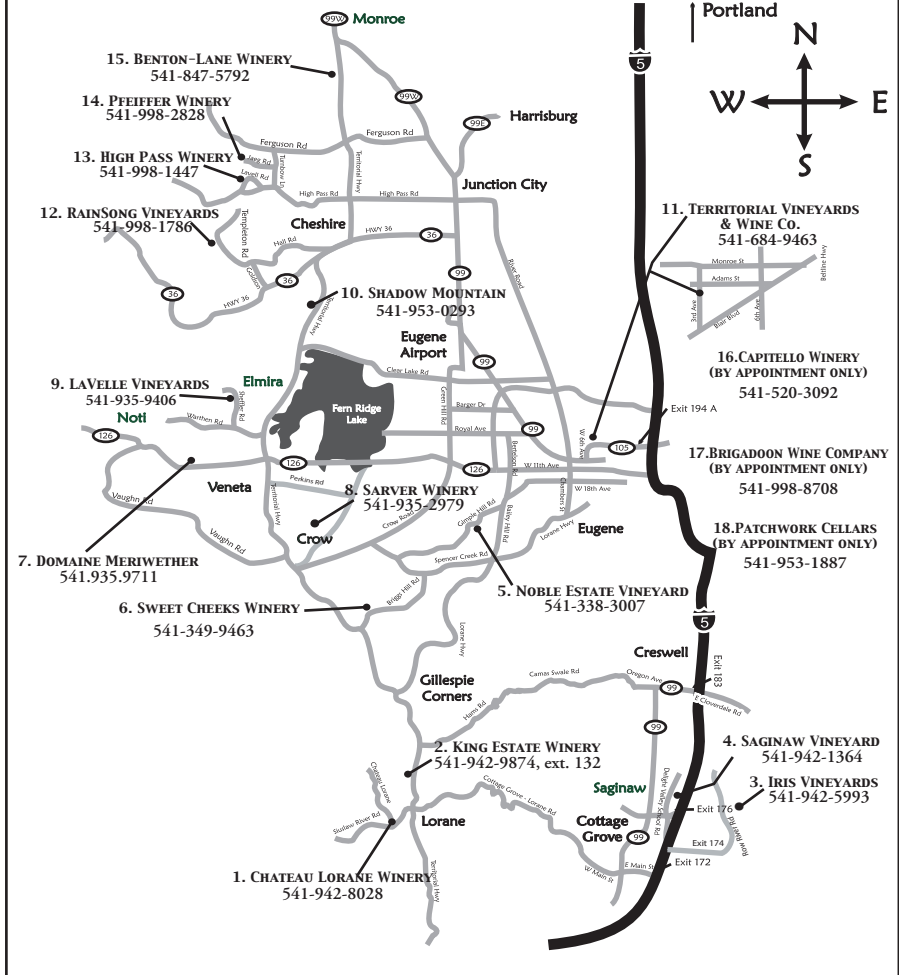
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